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THE CHORIAMBIC FOOT OF VERSE

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The important article by Professor Husband in the *Classical Journal* of February, 1914, entitled "The Old and the New in Metrics," points out as one of the distinguishing differences between the two classes of Greek metrists (the "logaoedists" and the school of which Professor J. W. White is the leading American representative) that the latter conceive of all Æolic verse as dominated by four-syllabled feet (chiefly by the choriamb $\text{—} \cup \cup \text{—}$) while the logaoedic school, or some of them, recognize no simple feet of more than three syllables and divide the so-called choriamb into two feet, a dactyl, and a mone or "protracted syllable" ($\text{—} \cup \cup \dot{\text{—}}$ —).

Professor White himself, in his scholarly book, *The Verse of Greek Comedy*, after speaking of the views advanced by Hermann Voss, Apel, and others "predisposed to the rhythms of modern poetry and music," says, "There was now general agreement that the choriamb must go; disagreement arose when it came to dismembering it—another deadly process—into the two diplasic feet required by logaoedic scansion."

The choriamb is named from the trochee (or choreus) and iamb, which together are held to constitute the foot, and according to Professor White and the older metrists it is "a simple foot of six periodic times." It is the dominating foot of:

1. Glyconic verse—
(having one choriamb)

$\overset{\circ}{\text{S}}\overset{\circ}{\text{ic}} \text{ te } \overset{\circ}{\text{d}}\overset{\circ}{\text{i}}\text{v}\bar{\text{a}} \text{ } \check{\text{po}}\check{\text{tens}} \check{\text{C}}\check{\text{y}}\bar{\text{p}}\bar{\text{i}}$

2. The minor Asclepiad—
(having two choriambs)

$\overset{\circ}{\text{O}} \text{ fons } \overset{\circ}{\text{B}}\bar{\text{a}}\check{\text{n}}\check{\text{d}}\check{\text{u}}\check{\text{s}}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{a}}\bar{\text{e}} \text{ splend}^{\circ}\check{\text{i}}\check{\text{d}}\check{\text{i}}\bar{\text{o}}\bar{\text{r}} \check{\text{v}}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{t}}\bar{\text{r}}\bar{\text{o}}$

3. The major Asclepiad—
(having three choriambs)

$\overset{\circ}{\text{T}}\bar{\text{u}} \overset{\circ}{\text{n}}\bar{\text{e}} \text{ } \check{\text{q}}\bar{\text{u}}\bar{\text{a}}\check{\text{e}}\check{\text{s}}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{e}}\check{\text{r}}\bar{\text{i}}\check{\text{s}}, \text{ } \check{\text{s}}\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{r}}\bar{\text{e}} \text{ } \check{\text{n}}\bar{\text{e}}\check{\text{f}}\bar{\text{a}}\check{\text{s}}, \text{ } \check{\text{q}}\bar{\text{u}}\bar{\text{e}}\check{\text{m}} \text{ } \check{\text{m}}\bar{\text{i}}\check{\text{h}}\bar{\text{i}}, \text{ } \check{\text{q}}\bar{\text{u}}\bar{\text{e}}\check{\text{m}} \text{ } \check{\text{t}}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{b}}\bar{\text{i}}.$

In each of these verse patterns the syllables in the first foot are called "unregulated"; yet the mind naturally conceives of them as long (even unusually long) so as to give approximately the same time to this foot as to the choriambic foot.

Although not very natural to English, choriambic verse has been written in this language, and Swinburne was especially successful in reproducing this Greek metrical pattern, as—

Large, red lilies of love, sceptral and tall, lovely for eyes to see,
Thornless blossoms of love, full of the sun, fruits that were reared for thee,

which is the same as the major Asclepiadean verse of the Horatian Odes. But in the scansion of his own verse (according to Professor White) "Swinburne, a good Grecian, would have nothing to do with the logaoedic theory of this verse."

It might be said that the logaoedic scansion of Swinburne's lines:

Large, | red | lilies of | love, | sceptral and | tall, | lovely for | eyes to | see

gives a clear and definite rhythm that is consistent with the accent and quantity of the syllables and not very widely different in its metrical effect from that given by the choriambic interpretation. Yet to a musical ear the scansion in the larger rhythm of four-syllabled feet gives a freer metrical swing and more melodious result than when it is chopped into the smaller divisions of one-syllabled and three-syllabled feet.

A similar relation of two forms of scansion may be found in the ordinary four-syllabled verse of English (which is, however, not choriambic, but "peonistic" in its metrical pattern).

There is an increasing tendency among metrists to interpret much English verse in four-syllabled feet, as—

Mine | eyes have seen the | glory of the | coming of the | Lord.

Many nursery rhymes may be so scanned, as

The | king was in his | counting-house a- | counting out his | money.

Will you | walk into my | parlor said the | spider to the | fly?

Yet a few years ago all of this would have been scanned as two-syllabled (iambic) verse, and even now it is often so interpreted, as

Mine eyes | have seen | the glo | ry of | the com | ing of | the Lord.

But the four-syllabled scansion (which adds a stronger emphasis to each alternate stressed syllable) gives a larger and freer rhythm and a more musical lilt to the verse than is suggested by the shorter foot divisions.

Professor White, however, bases his chief claim to the correct scansion of Greek "choriambic" verse on the fact that Aristoxenus, Aristides, and other ancient prosodists used the choriambic interpretation, although he acknowledges that the amount of evidence that can be brought forward as to how the ancients scanned their verse is rather meager.

But even if it be agreed that the early Greek prosodists scanned Æolic verse in choriambic, it does not prove that modern minds must hold precisely the same conceptions of either ancient or modern verse. Modern psychology has established it as a fundamental principle that the sense of rhythm is primarily a subjective impression, and that within certain limits (when the objective features of language, as accent, quantity, etc., are not antagonized) more than one conception of the details of a verse movement may often properly be carried.

Perhaps the greatest difference in the two modes of scansion for Asclepiadean verse above outlined lies in the fact of a different distribution of relative time values among the syllables themselves. The "logaoedic" scansion contains two kinds of "long" syllables, the long syllable of the dactyl being much shorter than the "protracted" syllable, which occupies a whole foot and is therefore subjectively equal to the whole dactylic foot which precedes.

But this distribution of syllabic time values *might* be given to the four-syllabled scansion also, while still keeping the larger rhythmic movement of four-syllabled verse. Thus the major Asclepiad might be thought of as—

— — — — —

Nor would such an interpretation be inconsistent with the quantitative character of the Greek language; for it is agreed by all modern Greek scholars that the "longs and shorts" of Greek verse had many variations in both their actual and relative time values.

To state the points thus far made in another way: The so-called choriambic foot may be (and has been) interpreted by prosodists in three different ways:

1. As trochee plus iamb (— ◡ —), the conception usually held; and the one which gives name to the foot.
2. As really two feet, a dactyl and a none or protracted syllable (— ◡ — | —), the conception held by certain metrists of the "logaoedic" school.
3. As a four-syllabled foot with the same syllabic lengths that are given by the logaoedists (— ◡ — —), the last syllable filling half the measure.

This interpretation of the choriamb is not usually given in the books of prosody and does not correspond with the name of the foot. But although no ancient prosodist can be quoted in its support, we do not believe that in the fifth century B.C. prosody was any more a definite and established science than it is today. Rhythm has always been primarily a subjective, and therefore variable, impression, and among the different conceptions which may have been carried by the early Greeks the one given above may naturally have found a place.

But this theory of the so-called choriambic foot has still some other points in its favor.

It is sometimes said that the most rudimentary and primary form of verse foot was probably the spondee. The two-syllabled foot which begins each of the choriambic verse patterns, although called "unregulated," is naturally conceived as a long spondee. In changing a spondee to a four-syllabled foot it would seem fully as easy to substitute for the first half a dactyl (which is a leading foot in Greek verse and is the dominating foot of the Greek hexameter) and leave the last half of the spondee unchanged, as to substitute for the two halves a trochee and an iamb. Also, if stress be considered as an element in Greek verse (and many prosodists believe that the long syllables have a degree of stress added to the long quantity), the stresses seem more regularly distributed in this form of scansion than by the use of the trochee and iamb which belong respectively to falling and rising rhythms.

There is still another point in favor of this scansion for "choriambic" verse. While it differs from the interpretations of both the logaoedists and the school to which Professor White belongs, it also has something in common with each. It has the larger, freer rhythm of four-syllabled verse, yet the same syllabic times that are given by the logaoedists. Perhaps for this reason it may be thought of as a means for helping the two schools to reconcile their differences. Since both schools of Greek metrists include scholarly men whose candor and learning cannot be questioned, it seems as if it must be possible to find somehow a common meeting-ground for the rhythmic conceptions of the older prosodists and of those who are "predisposed to the modern rhythms of music and of poetry."

In the words of Professor Exon of Trinity College, Dublin, "the whole subject of metrics, as to which there is so much disagreement, can only become clear when it is unified—when ancient verse is compared with modern verse and the element common to both, if there be one, disengaged."